I

The Forest and Its People

●174 THE KAINGÁNG WERE FOREST NOMADS. For perhaps three hundred years that was the only life they knew, and they resented it. The forest was not their original home, for they were driven into it from their farms on the savannahs to the west by their enemies. They speak with nostalgia of the time long ago when they lived in little fenced villages and planted corn, beans and pumpkins. Before the pacification they had no villages and instead of dividing their time between cultivating their crops and hunting in the forest as they used to do, they wandered forever in the forest and planted no crops at all.

137 The forests of Santa Catarina are vast and mighty; they are rich and well watered, tall and gloomy. Saplings and trees six feet in diameter crowd close upon one another. Bushes cluster about the trees, and the whole is woven into one solid mass by the vines that hang from trees, twine about bushes, and creep along the ground. The forest everywhere grows right down to the edges of the rivers and looms on both sides like the walls of a great corridor, silent and lovely, impenetrable except with knife or club. Flocks of geese, taboo to the Indians, for those landlocked creatures may not touch these timid and agile waterfowl, skim above the surface of the rivers, and wherever a lichen-covered cliff rises from the river's edge it throws their calls echoing back and forth across the water.

133 I used to joke with the Brazilians telling them that their beautiful state
132 of Santa Catarina was not a land but a solution, for it is indeed a country of ten thousand water courses. Innumerable little streams undermine the earth, and during the rainy season in August and September, when it sometimes rains for a month without cease, when day after day thunder rolls about the mountain tops and the wind blows and the forest rocks until you

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Vomblé, killing of his wife, wounding of Kangguin and killing of his son, 628
followed by the flight of some of the sons of Mumbégn together with their relatives by marriage and their hunting companions.

Third. Suspicion, followed by murder, breaks out among the murderers of Nduichá *et al.*

Fourth. Final disruption of the forces of the murderers (i.e. separation of Kumbló and Patklé).

Fifth. Slaughter of the women of Kumbló's group by Nduichá's group.

Sixth. Slaughter of men, women, and children of Nduichá's group by Kumbló's group.

Seventh. Massacre of Patklé and his sons by their relatives by marriage.

Eighth. Massacre of Kumbló and his sons by the children of Kumbló's half-brother Wanyekí.

It is easy to see from this summary what the history of the Kaingáng vendettas has been: murder, followed by flight of the killers; then conflict within the ranks of the murderers themselves, with ensuing murder and splitting of the group. The murderers are hunted down by the relatives and companions of the dead men and women until not one is left. No society can stand such conflict, and the history of the Kaingáng shows clearly that they have been diminishing in numbers. Even they themselves are perfectly aware of the fact that their population has dwindled and that they have been split up into smaller and smaller groups because of the feuds.

Many societies must have gone to pieces and disappeared under the in- 628
fluence of disruptive forces within. In the course of the development of 174
social forms those that fostered severe conflicts must ultimately have destroyed the societies in which they developed. The result would obviously be the gradual weeding out of such societies, and we would have left only such as could maintain themselves by satisfactorily reconciling the disintegrating forces within them. But from time to time in some societies situations develop that are incapable of adjustment, and that of the Kaingáng is one of these. In its otiose social theories and a curious system of body paints Kaingáng society shows traces of what may once have been a more complex social system. Their history goes back to a time when they lived in villages and cultivated the soil, but even then there were feuds. It is impossible to tell at present whether the development of the feuds brought about the destruction of a more complex social life or whether the contradictory social theories that we hear of today were ever more than notions picked up from contact with other cultures and never fully understood. But even in those very early times the Kaingáng were busily killing their affinal relatives and raiding the villages of "other" groups of their "own people."

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771 Kaingáng have attempted the same extension of their positive emotional
787 relationships, but with little success. The supernatural, to them, is an embodiment of terrors; for it is burdened with portents of death, and no matter what benefits the Kaingáng derive from the supernatural, death always dominates their outlook. In *vayú*, divining by belching, the great preoccupation is escape from death; *kumbĕdn*, divining by insects in the ashes of the dead, is completely devoted to omens of death; *kŏplĕgn*, divining with charcoal, is concerned with the location of animals that may be hunted and killed, or with the impending death of human beings, and the meteorological omens of rain, darkness, tempest, and flood are all portents of death.

787 The oral functions of biting, spitting, and blowing form part of supernatural curing techniques, but belching has been elevated to prophetic dignity. Through *vayú*, divining by belching, the Kaingáng obtain many important insights. Any adult who feels that he can divine by belching may take this function on himself, and he or she may be sought out and asked to drink an infusion of *matte*[26] so that his belches may give some information about the chances of death from the enemy, the hunting prospects in a given direction, or the whereabouts of a lost dog. The oracular belch always comes in answer to a request that is usually put to the practitioner in a form like this: "Belch to see whether, if I go to look for my wife and child, the enemy will see me." Then the practitioner drinks the infusion, and if he belches strongly it means "No"; and if weakly, "Yes."

787 *Kumbĕdn*, divining by insects, is connected with the exogamous system
303 which the Kaingáng say they possessed far back in ancient times. Accord-
619 ing to this tradition the Kaingáng were divided into five groups, with each
174 of which was associated a set of personal names and a design with which its members used to paint their bodies.[27] The Kaingáng still use these designs, but their only functions for two hundred years or more have been to protect the wearers against *kuplĕng* and supposedly to provide a point of reference for this system of divining by insects. To each group belong certain insects, the presence of which in funeral ashes betokened the impending death of a member of the group. A certain fly and a little butterfly called *toto*, for example, indicated the future death of those who use the dot pattern; and other insects, among them all the different varieties of bees, a wasp, and insects that the Indians call *ûpá* and *thathakumbĕdn* foretold the death of someone who bore the line pattern.

787 In spite of the precise way in which the Kaingáng formulate it, they

[26] This is the familiar *yerba maté* or *matte* that grows wild in southeastern South America, particularly in Brazil, Argentina, and Paraguay.

[27] See Appendix II for full explanation of this scheme.